

February 25, 2010

Honorable Members of the Labor Committee,

I am here today to support **House Bill 5207 An Act Concerning Criminal Background Checks for Prospective State Employees.**

In Connecticut, approximately 6000 people are released from prison each year (according to the Office of Legislative Reports). Each of these 6000 people will have enormous struggles as they try to reintegrate into society. And unfortunately, their efforts will be confounded by the high rate of discrimination that they face as they attempt to gain employment. Clearly it is in everyone's best interest to make sure that those convicted of felonies are not being denied jobs simply because they committed a crime in the past. We must do all that we can to assure that these people do not end up back in prison. This is not simply my personal opinion, but it is exactly what the state Department of Corrections (DOC) recognizes.

The Connecticut DOC's mission is to "provide... (inmates) with opportunities that support successful community reintegration." Of course this common sense approach is necessary, since most of those incarcerated will eventually be released.

Clearly prison is one of the most expensive examples in handling public safety. So the attempt to avoid recidivism is not simply a humane approach, but it is a cost effective method. But, unfortunately, Connecticut's own hiring policies fly in the face of that effort. Background checks prior to conditional job offers, and questions on applications about prior convictions only serve to increase discrimination against people with felonies. Being successfully employed is one of the best indicators that previously incarcerated people will not go back to prison.

People in Connecticut are looking for change. Four cities have already stepped up to oppose discrimination against people convicted of felonies. In Norwich, New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport, city-wide ordinances have been passed which remove the box from employment applications that ask if the applicant has been previously convicted. In those cities, a conditional job offer must be made before a background check is conducted. And only in those cases where the job is directly related to the crime that was committed, will it be taken into account during hiring.

In Connecticut over 200,000 residents have a felony conviction (according to the Office of Legislative Reports' of 2005-2007). The enormity of this issue requires urgent action. As a resident and taxpayer in your district I urge you to support HB 5207.

In addition, for this bill to become an effective law we need much more. We need

1. To ban the box: to explicitly remove the box and the question from the applications.
2. To widen the scope for all jobs.
3. To have more specific details including A. years since released B. rehabilitation C. what "related" would mean.
4. To explain the oversight/enforcement of this law.

Sincerely,


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